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Austen Henry Layard

Excerpt

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An Entrance to the Great Hall of the North-west Palace (Nimroud).

## CHAP. XVI.

DISCOVERIES AT KOUYUNJIK. — PROCESSION OF FIGURES BEARING FRUIT AND GAME. — LOCUSTS. — LED HORSES. — AN ASSYRIAN CAMPAIGN. — DAGON, OR THE FISH-GOD. — THE CHAMBERS OF RECORDS. — INSCRIBED CLAY TABLETS. — RETURN TO NIMROUD. — EFFECTS OF THE FLOOD. — DISCOVERIES. — SMALL TEMPLE UNDER HIGH MOUND. — THE EVIL SPIRIT. — FISH-GOD. — FINE BAS-RELIEF OF THE KING. — EXTRACTS FROM THE INSCRIPTION. — GREAT INSCRIBED MONOLITH. — EXTRACTS FROM THE INSCRIPTION. — CEDAR BEAMS — SMALL OBJECTS. — SECOND TEMPLE. — MARBLE FIGURE AND OTHER OBJECTS.

DURING my absence in the Desert, the excavations at Kouyunjik had been actively carried on under the superintendence of Toma Shishman. On my arrival he described many interesting discoveries, and I hastened to the ruins, crossing in a rude ferry-boat the river, now swollen, by the spring rains, to more than double its usual size.\*

\* The Tigris this year had risen much higher than usual. I have already mentioned that the plain of Nimroud was completely under water; opposite Mosul the flood nearly reached the mounds of Kouyunjik and Nebbi Yunus.

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The earth had been completely removed from the sides of the long gallery, on the walls of which had been portrayed the transport of the large stone and of the winged bulls.\* An outlet was discovered near its western end, opening into a narrow descending passage; an entrance, it would appear, into the palace from the river side.† Its length was ninety-six feet, its breadth not more than thirteen. The walls were panelled with sculptured slabs about six feet high.‡ Those to the right, in descending, represented a procession of servants carrying fruit, flowers, game, and supplies for a banquet, preceded by mace-bearers. The first servant following the guard bore an object which I should not hesitate to identify with the pineapple, unless there were every reason to believe that the Assyrians were unacquainted with that fruit. The leaves sprouting from the top proved that it was not the cone of a pine tree or fir. After all, the sacred symbol held by the winged figures in the Assyrian sculptures, may be the same fruit, and not, as I have conjectured, that of a coniferous tree.§

The attendants who followed carried clusters of ripe dates and flat baskets of osier-work, filled with pomegranates, apples, and bunches of grapes. They raised in one hand small green boughs to drive away the flies. Then came men bearing hares, partridges, and dried locusts fastened on rods. The locust has ever been an article of food in the East, and is still sold in the markets of many towns in Arabia.|| Being introduced in this bas-relief amongst the choice delicacies of a banquet, it was probably highly prized by the Assyrians.

The locust-bearers were followed by a man with strings of pome-

\* No. XLIX. Plan I.

† No. LI. same Plan.

‡ The figures are about 4½ feet in height.

§ It has been suggested to me that the object carried by the winged figures may be the fruit of the fan palm, a tree whose general usefulness has rendered it sacred to the natives of parts of South America, but which, as far as I am aware, could not have grown in Assyria, or in any countries visited by the Assyrians.

|| Burckhardt (Notes on the Bedouins, p. 269.) gives the following account of the mode of preparing them:—"The Arabs in preparing locusts as an article of food, throw them alive into boiling water, with which a good deal of salt has been mixed: after a few minutes they are taken out and dried in the sun. The head, feet, and wings are then torn off; the bodies are cleansed from the salt and perfectly dried; after which process whole sacks are filled with them by the Bedouins. They are sometimes eaten broiled in butter; and they often constitute materials for a breakfast when spread over unleavened bread mixed with butter." It has been conjectured that the locust eaten by John the Baptist in the wilderness was the fruit of a tree; but it is more probable that the prophet used a common article of food, abounding even in the Desert.

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Attendants carrying Pomegranates and Locusts (Kouyunjik).

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granates; then came, two by two, attendants carrying on their shoulders low tables, such as are still used in the East at feasts, loaded with baskets of cakes and fruits of various kinds. The procession was finished by a long line of servants bearing vases of flowers.

These figures were dressed in a short tunic, confined at the waist by a shawl or girdle. They wore no head-gear, their hair falling in curls on their shoulders.

On the opposite walls of the passage were fourteen horses without trappings, each horse having a simple halter twisted round its lower jaw, by which it was led by a groom. The animals and men were designed with considerable truth and spirit. The procession was marshalled by a staff-bearer, or chamberlain. The dresses of the grooms were richer than those of the banquet-bearers. They wore a short tunic and an embroidered belt, and to this was attached that ornament of fur, or colored fringe, peculiar to the costumes of the warriors of the later Assyrian period.\*

It is probable that the sculptures forming the upper end of the passage, but now entirely destroyed, represented the king receiving this double procession. The passage may have led to the banquetting-hall, or to a chamber, where royal feasts were sometimes held, and was therefore adorned with appropriate subjects. At its western end the gallery turned abruptly to the north, its walls being there built of solid stone-masonry. I lost all further traces of it, as the workmen were unable, at that time, to carry on the tunnel beneath an accumulated mass of earth and rubbish about forty feet thick. I did not, consequently, ascertain its western outlet. We had, however, nearly reached the edge of the mound; and as there was no space left for a chamber of any size beyond, this passage may have opened on a flight of steps, or on an incline leading from the river, and forming a kind of private entrance or postern into the palace.

As the workmen could no longer, without some danger, excavate in this part of the ruins, they had returned to the chamber already described as containing a series of bas-reliefs representing the capture and sack of a large city in the mountains, and as opening into the broad gallery on whose walls were depicted the various pro-

\* Specimens of the led horses, and of the figures bearing locusts, are now in the British Museum. The slabs in this passage had been so much injured by fire, that only a few of them could be removed. See Plates 7, 8, and 9. of the 2nd series of the Monuments of Nineveh for the entire series.

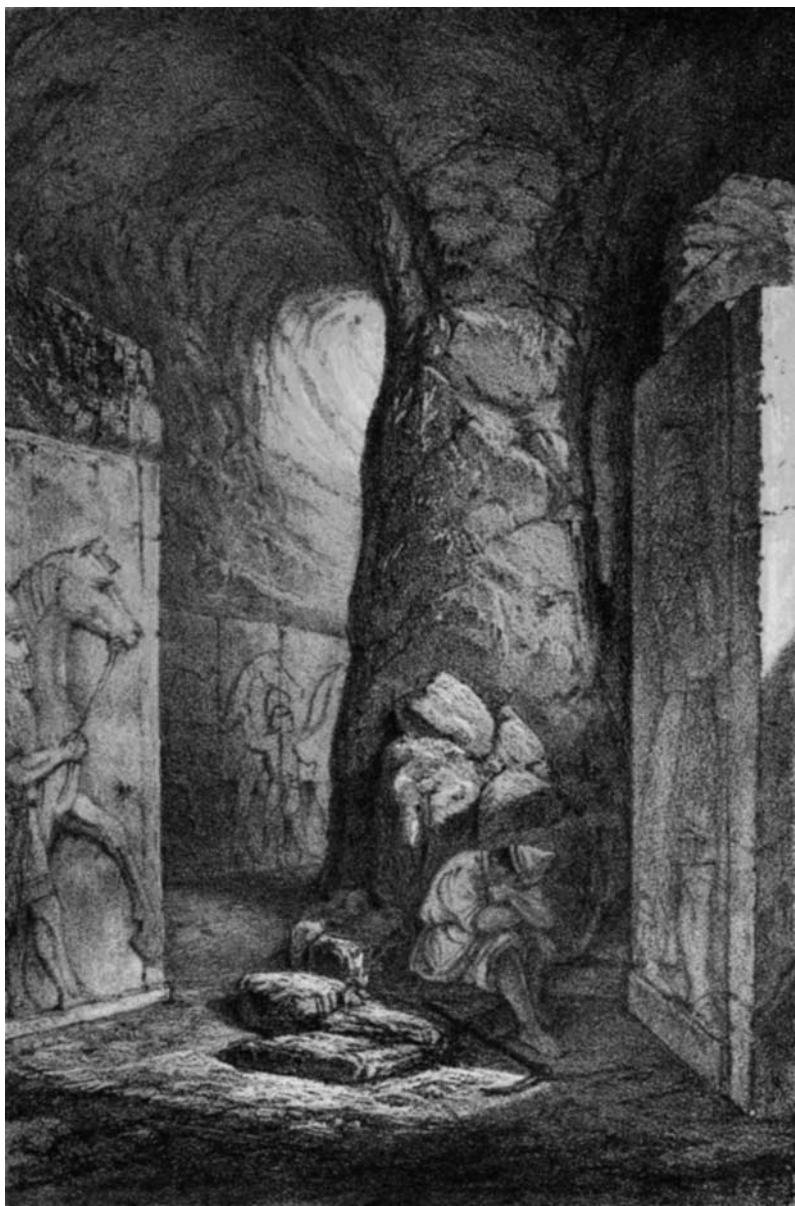
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Sketched on the spot by S. C. Malan

John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1852

N Chevalier, lith

*Entrance Passage. Kouyunjik.*



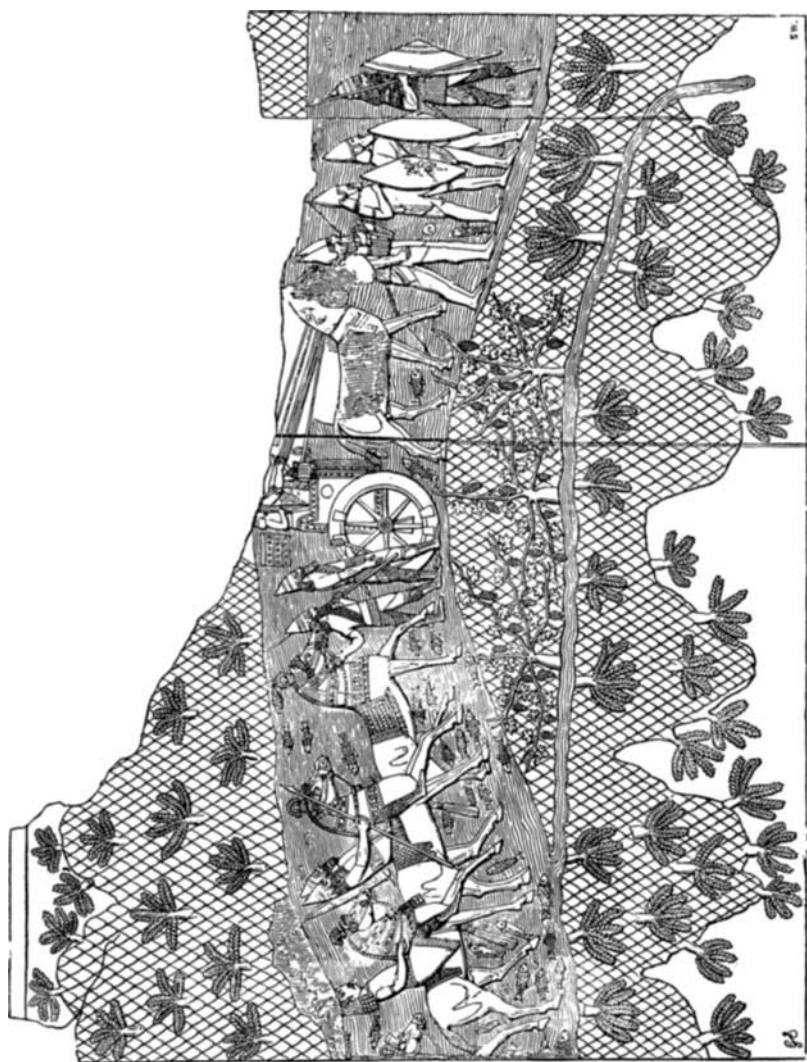
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The King in his Chariot passing through a Stream in a Valley (Eooyunuk).

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cesses employed by the Assyrians in moving their colossal figures.\* From this chamber branched to the south a narrow passage †, whose sculptured panels had been purposely destroyed. It led into a great hall, which the workmen did not then explore.‡ They continued for a few feet along its western side, and then turning through a doorway, discovered a chamber, from which again, always following the line of wall, they entered a spacious apartment§, completely surrounded with bas-reliefs, representing one continuous subject. The Assyrian army was seen fording a broad river amidst wooded mountains. The sculptor had endeavored to convey the idea of a valley by reversing the trees and mountains on one side of the stream. Rivulets flowed from the hills to the river, irrigating in their course vineyards and orchards. The king in his chariot was followed by a long retinue of warriors on foot and on horses richly caparisoned, by led horses with even gayer trappings, and by men bearing on their shoulders his second chariot, which had a yoke ornamented with bosses and carvings. He was preceded by his army, the variously accoutred spearmen and the bowmen forming separate regiments or divisions. After crossing the river they attacked the enemy's strongholds, which they captured one by one, putting to death or carrying into captivity their inhabitants. Unfortunately, the bas-reliefs describing the general result of the campaign, and probably the taking of the principal city, had been destroyed. Over one of the castles could be traced a few letters, giving no clue, however, to its name or site. The captives wore a kind of turban wrapped in several folds round the head, and a short tunic confined at the waist by a broad belt. From the nature of the country it may be conjectured that the sculptures represented a campaign in some part of Armenia, and I am inclined to identify the river with the Euphrates, near whose headwaters, as we learn from the bull inscriptions, Sennacherib waged one of his most important wars.

The slabs at the western end of this chamber were actually *curved backwards*, showing the enormous pressure that must have taken place from the falling in of the upper part of the building,

\* No. XLVIII. Plan I.

† No. XLII. same Plan; 72 feet long, and 11 broad. ‡ No. XIX. same Plan.

§ Nos. XXIX. and XXXVIII. same Plan. The reader will understand the way in which the excavations were here carried on by referring to the Plan. It will be perceived that there is an uninterrupted line of wall, along which the tunnel was carried, from No. XLII. to No. XXXVIII., through entrances *b*, *g*, and *f*.

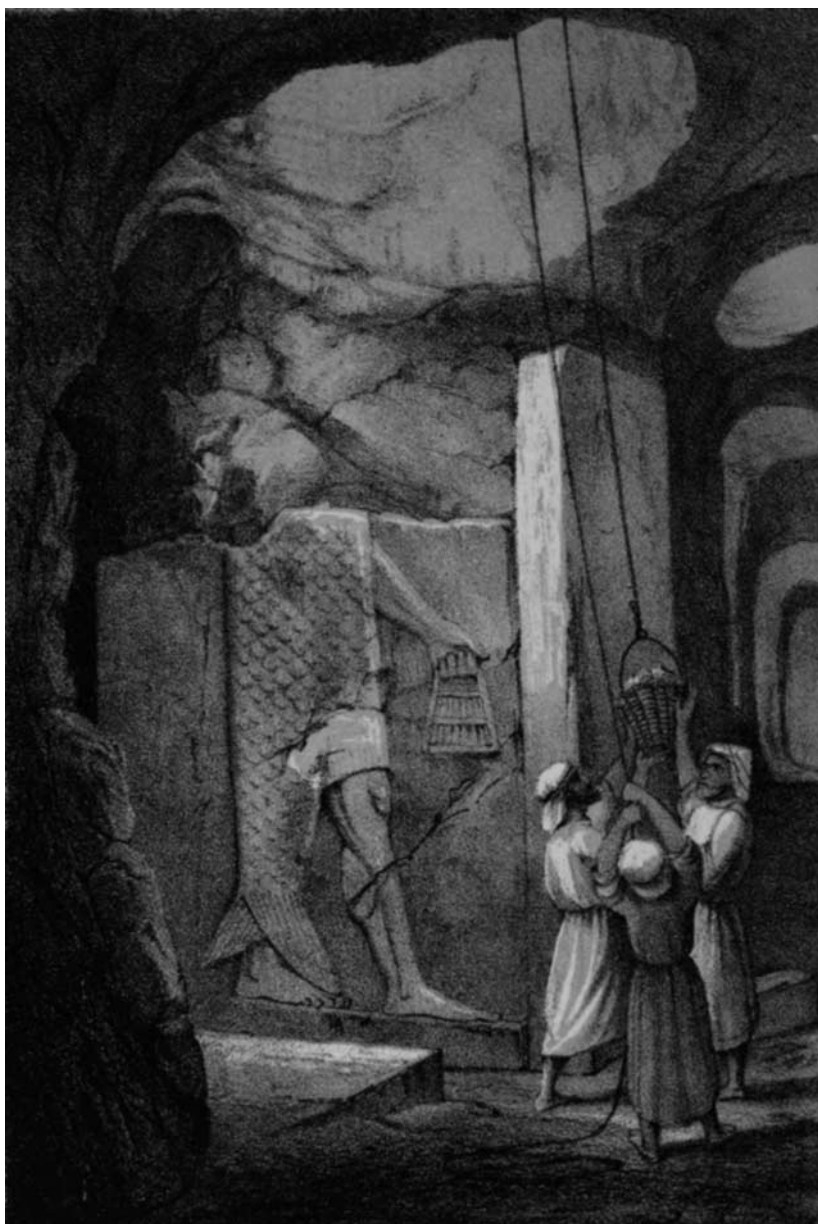
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N. Chevalier, lith

*Fish God, Kouyunjik*



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by which not only the alabaster was bent, but driven into the wall of sundried bricks.

On the north side of the chamber were two doorways leading into separate apartments. Each entrance was formed by two



Assyrian Cylinder, with Dagon, or the Fish god.

colossal bas-reliefs of Dagon, or the fish-god. Unfortunately the upper part of all these figures had been destroyed, but as the lower remained from above the waist we can have no difficulty in restoring the whole, especially as the same image is seen entire on a fine Assyrian cylinder of agate in my possession.

It combined the human shape with that of the fish. The head of the fish formed a mitre above that of the man, whilst its scaly back and fanlike tail fell as a cloak behind, leaving the human limbs and feet exposed. The figure wore a fringed tunic, and bore the two sacred emblems, the basket and the cone.\*

We can scarcely hesitate to identify this mythic form with the Oannes, or sacred man-fish, who, according to the traditions preserved by Berossus, issued from the Erythræan Sea, instructed the Chaldæans in all wisdom, in the sciences, and in the fine arts, and was afterwards worshipped as a god in the temples of Babylonia. Its body, says the historian, was that of a fish, *but under the head of a fish was that of a man*, and to its tail were joined women's feet. Five such monsters rose from the Persian Gulf at fabulous intervals of time.† It has been conjectured that this myth denotes the conquest of Chaldæa at some remote and prehistoric period, by a comparatively civilised nation coming in ships to the mouth of the Euphrates. I had already ‡ identified with the Babylonian idol a figure in a bas-relief at Khorsabad, having the human form to the waist, and the extremities of a fish. Such figures are also



Fish-god on Gems in the British Museum.

frequently found on antique cylinders and gems, but those at Kouyunjik agreed even more minutely with the description of Berossus,

\* It is remarkable that on this cylinder the all-seeing eye takes the place of the winged human figure and the globe in the emblem above the sacred tree.

† Cory's fragments, page 30.

‡ See Nineveh and its Remains, vol. ii. p. 466.

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for the human head was actually beneath that of the fish, whilst the human feet were added to the spreading tail.

The Dagon of the Philistines and of the inhabitants of the Phœnician coast was worshipped, according to the united opinion of the Hebrew commentators on the Bible, under the same form.\* When the ark of the Lord was brought into the great temple of the idol at Ashdod, and the statue fell a second time, "the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the *fishy part* of Dagon was left to him."† His worship appears to have extended over Syria, as well as Mesopotamia and Chaldæa. He had many temples, as we learn from the Bible, in the country of the Philistines, and it was probably under the ruins of one of them that Samson buried the people of Gaza who had "gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and to rejoice."‡ We also find a Beth-Dagon, or the house of Dagon, amongst the uttermost cities of the children of Judah §, and another city of the same name in the inheritance of the children of Asher.||

Colonel Rawlinson states that he has read the name of Dagon amongst the gods of the Assyrians in the cuneiform inscriptions.

The first doorway, guarded by the fish-gods, led into two small chambers opening into each other, and once panelled with bas-reliefs, the greater part of which had been destroyed.¶ On a few fragments, still standing against the walls, could be traced a city on the shore of a sea whose waters were covered with galleys. I shall call these chambers "the chambers of records," for, like "the house of the rolls," or records, which Darius ordered to be searched for the decree of Cyrus, concerning the building of the temple of Jerusalem\*\*, they appear to have contained the decrees of the Assyrian kings as well as the archives of the empire.

I have mentioned elsewhere †† that the historical records and public documents of the Assyrians were kept on tablets and cylinders

\* The authorities respecting this god are collected in Selden, "De Dis Syris," and in Beyer's commentary. Abarbanel, in his commentary on Samuel, says that Dagon had the form of a fish, from the middle downwards, with the feet and hands of a man.

† 1 Sam. v. 4.

‡ Judges, xvi. 23.

§ Joshua, xv. 41. From the connection of this verse with the 33rd, it would appear that the town was in a valley.

¶ Joshua, xix. 27. 1 Mac. x. 83.

Nos. XL. and XLI. Plan I.

\*\* Ezra, vi. 1.

†† Nineveh and its Remains, vol. ii. p. 185.